

<b>Environment Committee Meeting</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	8 September 2022
<b>Report Title</b>	Levelling up Parks Fund
<b>EMT Lead</b>	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
<b>Head of Service</b>	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Graeme Tuff, Greenspaces Manager
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. To delegate to the Head of Environment and Leisure to submit a bid for 'Levelling Up Parks Fund' for Barton's Point.

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Committee are asked to consider the opportunity for the council to bid for Levelling Up Parks fund and decide which area to focus the bid.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 On 1 August 2022, the Government launched the Levelling Up Parks Fund. The purpose of this fund is to give grants to the places the Government have identified as most in need of quality green space.
- 2.2 Swale Borough Council has been identified as one of the 85 Councils nationally who meet these criteria. To qualify, the council had to satisfy 2 criteria.
- i) Are in the top 2 deciles of the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)
  - ii) Less than 5% of the total LSOA area is covered by, or within 200m of, an accessible green space of at least 0.5Ha. This includes public or country parks, local nature reserves and playing fields, and access land.

The Government used Natural England's 2021 analysis of Green Infrastructure to check for these criteria.

2.3 The funding for this scheme is £85,000. This is an equal grant for all areas. The grant must be spent in the following way:

1. Up to £47,500 capital for creation or improvement of the park
2. Up to £18,500 revenue for project prep, creation and maintenance
3. Up to £19,000 'tree uplift' for tree planting and related costs

Eligible councils will also receive an initial site assessment by Green Flag Awards, which the department has paid for to the value of £450.

2.4 The Government have set out their expectations as to what items should be funded from the grant:

#### 2.4.1 **Creation or improvement of the park.**

This includes hard landscaping, e.g. boundaries, paving, paths, metal fencing to children's play area, natural play spaces, artwork, signs, benches, lighting, fencing and gates sculpture, and soft landscaping e.g. bulb planting, trees, shrubs, wildflowers, turfing, seeding, wildlife features such as bird and bat boxes.

#### 2.4.2 **Project preparation, creation and maintenance**

This can be used for consultants or landscape architects, site surveys, training or events to celebrate the opening and ongoing maintenance and evaluation. We will also receive an initial assessment of the project by Green Flag Awards.

#### 2.4.3 **Tree Uplift**

There is no separate application process for the 'tree uplift' funding, which is provided by Defra. This can be used to cover the cost of preparation, purchase, planting, or related cost of trees in any of the urban green spaces within scope of this project. We will just be asked to explain how the Council plans to spend the trees uplift funding in the project proposal.

2.5 The Government have set the following timescales for delivery of this grant.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
Eligible local authorities contacted and asked to complete opt-in form	1 August 2022
Opt-in form completion deadline.	5 September 2022

Councils asked to prepare a project proposal and invited to organise pre-project site assessment with Green Flag Awards	September 2022
Councils required to attend workshops with stakeholders.	Date to be confirmed
Project proposal and 'memorandum of understanding' deadline. Letters of determination and grants sent when these are received.	3 October 2022
Pre-project site assessments undertaken by Green Flag Awards.	By 30 October 2022

- 2.6 Officers used delegated powers to 'opt in' to the scheme, however site proposal needs to be drawn up and submitted by 3 October 2022
- 2.7 Officers have looked closely at the criteria and believe there are three possibilities that meet the requirements of the scheme.

#### **A) Barton's Point – Isle of Sheppey**

Capital improvements within the park would include re surfacing the car park, improving current facilities including signage, gates and the provision of additional benches across the site. Further work could include ongoing maintenance to other structures on site such as bridges. To help enhance the green side of the park new trees could be planted close to the play park, car park and entrance to help provide shade. There is an abundance of wildlife that use this area meaning nature trails and habitats could be created around the water's edge. Funding within this park would also include £5k spent on monitoring and evaluating park usage to help make better informed long term management plans. Barton's Point is located close to Sheerness which has high levels of deprivation and is also a strong candidate for future Green Flag judging. Barton's Point is the site that closest meets the requirements of the grant.

#### **B) Faversham Recreation Ground**

Funding within the park could be used to resurface the path leading from the top of the site down towards Whitstable Road entrance. We would look to use permeable pathways or the creation of biospheres for collecting water runoff. Other work would include planting standard trees across the park and further enhancements to natural areas and new habitat creation i.e. bird and bat boxes. Funding within this park would also include £5k spent on monitoring and evaluating park usage to help make better-informed long-term management plans. A negative of this location is that it is not in an area of deprivation (LSOA 1) although it is close to the Millfield estate. Faversham Recreation Ground is the most likely of our three proposed locations to be awarded a green flag.

## **C) Milton Recreation Ground**

Milton recreation ground would benefit from funding through improved paths and better vehicle access onto the site and improvements to the seating area and sports court areas. Green improvements within the park would include a mixture of whip and standard tree planting and the introduction of bird and bat boxes. We could also include some wildflower areas to help draw new wildlife and increase the overall diversity of the park. Funding within this park would also include £5k spent on monitoring and evaluating park usage to help make better-informed long-term management plans. This area is least likely to achieve the Green Flag status.

## **3 Proposals**

3.1 The Officer recommendation is to apply for the Grant for Barton's Point. The reasons for the recommendation are

- a) The proposal most closely fits the criteria as set out by the Government
- b) The work would lead on from the Levelling Up Bid submitted by Officers. Barton's Point was flagged during Levelling Up Fund consultation as a target for investment, and whilst Beachfields was found to be the best fit for LUF, the desire to invest in Barton's Point was evident
- c) The area stands a reasonable chance of obtaining a Green Flag.
- d) The work would complement other works being undertaken at Barton's Point.

## **4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

4.1 The other alternatives considered and rejected are

- a) To not 'opt in' to the funding – this was rejected as it is an opportunity to carry out works to improve the green space offer in the Borough.
- b) To recommend Faversham Recreation Ground – Although this site has a good chance of obtaining a Green Flag award, it is not in the LSOA area, it would be a challenge to meet the requirements.
- c) To recommend Milton Recreation Ground – It would be unlikely to be successful due to the challenges with obtaining the Green Flag for the site.
- d) Going out to consultation via Area Committees and a 'call for projects'. This was rejected due to the tight timescales for this grant and the requirement to work up the successful bid before the deadline of 3 October 2022. Furthermore, the suggestions we did receive would not likely meet the strict criteria.

## 5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Due to the short timescale, we have not been able to undertake consultation, however the conditions of the grant require the council to “Consult and engage with your community during project design and delivery whenever possible”.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	A successful bid to the fund for Barton’s Point would support two of the Council’s four corporate priorities, ‘Investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges’ and ‘Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone’. It would particularly support objectives 2.1, 2.5, 3.2 and 3.5.
Financial, Resource and Property	The financial implications of a bid are as set out in the body of the report. A successful bid could have ongoing implications for the Council’s revenue budget, but these are considered to be de minimis and will be considered as part of the future year’s budget process once the detail of the scheme is established.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	In the event of a successful bid, any necessary procurement would be undertaken in accordance with the constitutional contract standing orders.
Crime and Disorder	There is some potential for a successful bid to have a positive influence on crime and disorder through the provision of diversionary activities.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	A positive bid would have a beneficial impact on Swale’s environment and on biodiversity within the Borough.
Health and Wellbeing	Providing a high quality green spaces will support public health objectives through regular access to safe, outdoor space and activity.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	No implications identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	In the event of a successful bid, works would be undertaken and the resulting facility managed in compliance with the Council’s health and safety policies and procedures.
Equality and Diversity	An equality impact assessment may be necessary in the event of a successful bid, prior to final specification being agreed.
Privacy and Data Protection	No implications identified at this stage.

**7 Appendices**

7.1 None

**8 Background Papers**

8.1 None